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Leaders Call Alliance  
Lifeline, Not Scalpel

By Marv Knox

RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)--Southern Baptist Alliance leaders have described their new organization as a lifeline to save some Southern Baptists, not a scalpel to amputate them from their convention.

Alliance members discussed the future during their group's first national convocation at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C., May 14-15. The alliance has received broad criticism within the Southern Baptist Convention by people who have charged it provides the organizational apparatus for disgruntled moderate-conservatives to leave the denomination, plagued for eight years by theological and political controversy.

"We want to provide a lifeline to Southern Baptists who are discouraged and keep them from leaving the denomination," said Henry Crouch, alliance president and pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C.

Crouch added that lifeline is one of nurture, not politics: "We have said from the beginning, we are not political; we will not be political. Most all of us (as individuals) are moderates, and we have been political. But that is not the purpose of the Southern Baptist Alliance."

During a pre-convocation board meeting, members placed distance between the alliance and their more politically active moderate-conservative colleagues.

Walter Shurden, dean of Mercer University's school of religion in Macon, Ga., described a "division of the house" between the "political group" and the "alliance or fellowship group" of moderate-conservatives during a meeting last summer in Macon.

"The way we'd been doing things as moderates was not getting us anywhere," Bill Puckett, pastor of Millbrook Baptist Church in Raleigh, said of the political effort to motivate Southern Baptist messengers to attend the SBC annual meeting and elect a moderate-conservative candidate as president. The result for moderates who helped form the alliance was a retooling of efforts, "not to win the presidency, but to establish some passion for things we believe in."

That passion grew out of a realization the political struggle -- which moderate-conservatives consistently have lost by about 55/45-percent vote margins -- is out of reach for the time being, Crouch explained:

"We recognized we won't be on convention boards and control what's happening. And that's OK; we'll be positive. This group is through with politics. We don't plan to play that way any more."

However, the political specter appeared at least twice during the two days. Two people with ties to the political wing of the moderate-conservative camp made speeches.

John Jeffers, retired pastor of First Baptist Church of Auburn, Ala., and a representative of "Mainstream Southern Baptists" told the alliance board of directors about his group's political plans for this and upcoming years. Norman Cavender, a layman from Claxton, Ga., and also affiliated with politically active moderates, presented a lecture to convocation participants on religious liberty.

But in his speech, Cavender, who is a member of both groups, urged alliance members to keep their organization free from overt political activity. "'Political' means simply you're relating to people. And in that sense, there's no way this group can be truly non-political," he said. "But we're not going to use these meetings to whip up campaigns to get out the vote or to use them as rallies. The purpose is to find a way to be more authentically Baptist."

That definition of authenticity has motivated alliance leaders to be involved in an organization whose existence admittedly scares other moderates, those who are afraid the alliance will lead friends and colleagues out of the convention.

"We keep getting press about splintering and starting a new denomination. That's not in our conversation and intent," said Mahan Siler, pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church in Raleigh and organizer of the convocation. "Hopefully, rather than eroding the convention, this will provide a vision for people to stay in the SBC with concern and leadership. A lot of Southern Baptists are hungering for support. They feel alienated.

"I'm personally in it to provide a support place for younger ministers," he added. "I want them to feel there's a place of support with a kind of ministry with which they can identify -- to show them there's an option to stay in the convention."

Realistically, those younger ministers "cannot talk of winning" political battles within the SBC, noted Susan Lockwood Wright, pastor of Cornell Baptist Church in Chicago and alliance vice president. "We have to realize we're in exile. ... We have to be a faithful remnant."

And that remnant has a hard time envisioning itself apart from the convention, she said: "I am who I am because I'm a Baptist and a Southern Baptist. Many of us are almost incapable of giving up our identity. It's hard to leave when you're a Baptist. ... Southern Baptist Alliance can give us a sense of community and hope. ... We have to have a home."

But will that home ever be somewhere else? Alliance members agreed they support SBC institutions because of the personnel and heritage that remains with them, not because of new policies that have been or will be implemented by more conservative trustees. What will happen when, through time, the personnel change to match the new policies?

"We don't need, we don't plan and we don't want to compete with our institutions," Crouch said. "But it would be easy. ... If we put out a call, 'We need \$100,000 for home missions,' we could do it overnight."

The alliance should be "a place to be Southern Baptist, even when the institutions leave us," Wright said. "I would never say categorically we aren't the roots of another denomination. But most of us want to stay. We just can't survive without hope."

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Alliance Talks 'Supplement,'  
Not 'Split' During Meeting

By Marv Knox

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RALEIGH, N.C. (BP)—Southern Baptist Alliance members talked more of supplementing the work of their denomination than splitting from it during their first national meeting.

Widely criticized as a potential vehicle that could carry disgruntled moderate-conservatives out of the Southern Baptist Convention, the alliance focused instead on denominational heritage when about 400 members gathered at Meredith College in Raleigh, N.C., May 14-15.

But the alliance voted without dissent to create four task forces to look into "problem" areas of Southern Baptist life. Three of those can have direct impact on denominational organizations:

— Educational literature. The alliance force will study the feasibility of producing Christian educational materials to be used within local congregations. If developed, these products would be in direct competition with materials produced by the Southern Baptist Sunday School Board.

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This task force is "overdue as of last fall," said Cecil Sherman, pastor of Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas.

At that time, the Sunday School Board published a series of Sunday school lessons that moderate-conservatives said provided a too-narrow interpretation of Genesis. Several moderate-conservative churches returned their materials to the board, expressing displeasure with content they claimed catered to fundamental-conservatives.

"I would say literature is our big concern," said Henry Crouch, alliance president and pastor of Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, N.C. "The fundamentalists have said they wanted parity, but what they (the Sunday School Board) have done is stop publishing our literature. We're not going to have that literature coming into our churches."

Of the Sunday School Board and its relationship to moderate-conservatives, Crouch said, "At this point, they act like they don't want us."

-- Women in ministry. This task force particularly will study ways the alliance can help mission churches who call women as pastors.

This issue was precipitated by a decision the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board made last fall to deny Church Pastoral Assistance funds to mission churches with women pastors. Alliance members failed in an effort to get that decision appealed during the board's March meeting.

Crouch told the alliance's board of directors he has received "many letters" since the organization was launched Feb. 12, particularly "pleas for help from the field."

"We could not let this convocation go by without organizing a task force ... to help people" who might not qualify for the Home Mission Board's financial supplements, he said.

-- Religious liberty. This group will work to secure separation of church and state from encroachment by both religious groups and government.

This endeavor currently is the responsibility of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, a coalition of nine Baptist bodies, including the SBC. The BJCPA has been under fire from more conservative Southern Baptists, particularly for not opposing the School Prayer Amendment and for not supporting anti-abortion measures. Changes in the composition of the BJCPA will be presented to messengers to the SBC annual meeting June 16-18.

The religious liberty task force was not originally proposed by the alliance committee that presented the task forces. But participants unanimously endorsed a proposal by Henry Greene of Cocoa, Fla., to create the group.

-- Placement. This service will help like-minded ministers locate in congregations which generally share the alliance's views. It also will help moderate-conservative Southern Baptists who move to locate sympathetic congregations in their new home communities.

Unlike the other three task forces, the placement group does not overlap responsibilities with any Southern Baptist organization. Alliance members affirmed its value, however, citing the need for "networking" among ministers and laypeople seeking to affiliate with Southern Baptists of similar viewpoints.

In addition to the task forces, the alliance approved without dissent a motion to express appreciation for a document titled "A Pastoral Plea for Peace Among Southern Baptists."

The four-part theological statement was sponsored by four Southern Baptist pastors who claimed no affiliation with either group in the convention's theological/political controversy. However, many of the 100-plus published signers of the document are known to be associated with the moderate-conservative cause.

In addition to the "Pastoral Plea," the alliance has its own seven-part "covenant." It commits members to freedom of the individual, freedom of the local church, the larger body of Christ, the servant role of leadership, theological education, the proclamation of Christ and the principle of a free church in a free state. One morning of the alliance's convocation was devoted to in-depth study of the covenant and its implications for church and denominational life.

In other matters:

— The alliance's four officers, selected by the founding temporary board of directors this spring, were elected to one-year terms. They are Crouch, president; Susan Lockwood Wright, pastor of Cornell Baptist Church in Chicago, first vice president; Richard Groves, pastor of Wake Forest Baptist Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., secretary; and Bruce Morgan, pastor of First Baptist Church of Greenville, S.C., treasurer.

The board of directors also was empowered to elect a second vice president, to be a layperson.

— A constitution and bylaws for the new organization was approved without dissent. Directors were asked to work out details of proposed changes in the fledgling document and present those amendments to the group next spring.

— Alliance members gathered in state or regional groups to select members for the organization's first permanent board and to make plans for organizing the alliance on state or regional levels.

— Inspirational services illustrated the convocation theme, "Celebrating Our Baptist Heritage." Included were two worship services, a historical/dramatic presentation and a banquet.

The alliance has 800 individual members from 28 states, Crouch said, noting 70 percent of those members are laypeople. In addition, eight churches with a total of 4,000 members have joined. Alliance leaders hope the organization will include 2,000 individual members by mid-May of next year, he added.

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Anti-Bias Laws Protect Jews,  
Arabs, High Court Rules

By Stan Hastey

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WASHINGTON (BP)—The Supreme Court ruled May 18 that Jews and Arabs qualify as racial minorities under a 19th century federal law banning discrimination.

A unanimous high court held that because members of Congress who enacted the 1870 law intended to include a wide variety of ethnic and religious groups considered at the time to be racial minorities, such groups are protected from discrimination today despite the fact that many of their members now are considered Caucasians.

In a pair of brief written opinions for the court, Justice Byron R. White said he and the other eight justices "have little trouble in concluding that Congress intended to protect from discrimination identifiable classes of persons who are subjected to intentional discrimination solely because of their ancestry or ethnic characteristics." He concluded, "Such discrimination is racial discrimination that Congress intended ... to forbid, whether or not it would be classified as racial in terms of modern scientific theory."

One of the decisions involved a suit brought by the Shaare Tefila Congregation of Silver Spring, Md., whose synagogue was defaced by vandals in November 1982. Anti-Semitic slogans, phrases and symbols -- including swastikas -- were sprayed on the synagogue's outside walls with red and black paint, leading the congregation to bring suit against the vandals for violating the federal anti-bias law.

Both a federal district court and an appeals panel earlier denied the claim, holding Jews did not qualify as a racial minority under the law.

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But the high court reversed the lower courts' findings, holding they were based "on the notion that because Jews today are not thought to be members of a separate race, they cannot make out a claim of racial discrimination" under terms of the 1870 law. "The question before us," White wrote for the court, "is not whether Jews are considered to be a separate race by today's standards, but whether, at the time (the law) was adopted, Jews constituted a group of people that Congress intended to protect."

In the other decided case, the court held that an Arab-American may press an anti-discrimination claim against Saint Francis (Pa.) College on grounds he was denied tenure as a faculty member solely because of his race.

Majid Ghaidan Al-Khazraji, a U.S. citizen born in Iraq, claimed the Roman Catholic school's trustees denied him tenure in 1978 solely because of his race. In his case, a lower federal court of appeals agreed, and the college brought the challenge to the high court.

The court's 9-0 decisions made clear that courts in the future must apply the protection of the 1870 law as well to other groups considered racial minorities in the 19th century.

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Edwards Joins Union  
University, Leaves RTVC

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JACKSON, Tenn. (BP)—James W. Edwards, senior vice president for finance of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission, will become vice president of academic affairs and dean of Union University, effective June 1.

Edwards, who for three and a half years, has been the senior vice president of finance and, for 15 months, chief operating officer of the RTVC, also will be professor of economics and finance in the business department of Union, a 1,500 student undergraduate college affiliated with the Tennessee Baptist Convention.

At the RTVC, he was instrumental in helping the Fort Worth, Texas-based agency launch a national television network, ACTS, and in keeping the fledgling network financially viable during its most critical periods.

Fred Roach, chairman of the financial committee of the RTVC, who worked closely with Edwards during the formative years of ACTS, told Baptist Press: "I think the Lord brought Jim Edwards to the RTVC for those critical years where he could effectively interface with the banking community. Our banking connection was probably more sensitive then than at any part of history, as was our relationship with the auditors. He helped us through those critical days probably better than any other single person could have done."

Roach, a Dallas homebuilder and a certified public accountant, added: "I think our financial crisis is behind us. The day-to-day finances are as critical as ever, but our overall financial crisis is less than two years ago."

Edwards will continue to be a part-time consultant and vice president of development services for the ACTS Satellite Network, a subsidiary of RTVC.

Hiran Barefoot, Union's president, said Edwards will be in charge of the academic program, faculty and curriculum at Union, as well as teaching and helping to establish a new business school, which trustees approved in February.

"We do have in our plans the establishment of a school of business and are very definitely pursuing that," Barefoot said. "We will open that school in the fall of 1988, and will be moving toward offering a master of business administration degree. Because of his background, Jim Edwards will be able to help us a great deal in that."

He added Edwards had been a consultant for telecommunications for several months before accepting the vice presidency and deanship.

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Edwards, a native of Henderson, Ky., received a bachelor of science degree in accounting and secondary education from Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.; a master of business administration degree from Indiana University and his doctorate in financial management and accounting from Michigan State University.

Prior to going to the RIVC, Edwards served as vice president and dean of the college as well as vice president of administrative affairs at Dallas Baptist University; director of the graduate business program, chairman of the accounting department and director of financial aid at Southern Methodist University in Dallas; and chairman of the accounting department at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas.

He also has taught at Western Kentucky University, University of Virginia, Indianapolis Central University and in the Hardin County, Ky., public schools.

Edwards has been a management consultant to the Carnegie Foundation, the Baptist General Convention of Texas Church Loans Corporation, Price-Waterhouse & Co., a national accounting firm, and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

He served for two terms as the mayor of Plano, Texas, a fast-growing suburb of Dallas, and has been active in church and community affairs. He is married, and he and his wife, Imogene, have three children.